

## Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary – Meeting of March 10, 2009

2

### Voting Members Present

April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing New England Development
William P. Farley	Town of Somerset
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer of greater than 50)
Gregory Knoop	Oudens Knoop Knoop + Sachs Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart (Chair)	Friendship Heights Village Council
R. Mallory Starr (Vice Chair)	Somerset House Management Association
David Viertels	EagleBank (Employer of fewer than 50)
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

### Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Kenneth Hartman	Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center

### TMD Staff Present

Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
-------------	-------------------------------------------------

### Absent

Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Charles Kines	M-NCPPC
Jessica Moore	The JBG Companies
N. Leslie Olson	Chevy Chase Land Company
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of greater than 50)

### Guests

Fred Delacruz	Saks Fifth Avenue
Marc Elrich	Montgomery County Council
Tiffany Gee	Chevy Chase Land Company
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Julian Mansfield	Village of Friendship Heights
Philip McLaughlin	Ride On Operations and Planning
Jeffrey Slavin	Mayor, Town of Somerset
Dale Tibbitts	Chief of Staff – Councilmember Elrich's Office

\*\*\*\*\*

**Items 1,2,3 – Introductions, Review Approval of February's minutes, Chair's Comments.** Members and guests introduced themselves.

The minutes from the February meeting were approved as written.

**Chair Robert Schwarzbart** expressed appreciation to guests **Councilmember Marc Elrich**, Chief of Staff **Dale Tibbitts** and Ride On Operations Planner **Philip McLaughlin** for attending the meeting. Mr. Schwarzbart stated that he recognized the guests' busy schedules and looked forward to their contributions to the meeting.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** reminded the committee that Metro representatives would be available at the Friendship Heights Village Center on Thursday, March 12, from 2 pm to 5 pm to sell Senior SmarTrip cards. Mr. Schwarzbart asked members to pass the information along to their constituents.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** noted that the February meeting, which included a teleconference with **Elice Perez**, DC General Manager for Zipcar, was timely because of an article on car sharing that appears in the March 8th edition of the New York Times Magazine. **Jim Carlson** said he would make the article available to the committee by email.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** announced that Friendship Heights Village Manager **Julian Mansfield** attended a February 9th workshop held by the County Council's Committee on Transportation and Environment (T&E Committee). **Mr. Mansfield** stated that **Councilmember Nancy Floreen** has introduced legislation that would ban the use of bricks, cobblestones and bricklike concrete pavers for most new or reconstructed public walkways throughout the County, which caught the attention of Friendship Heights officials. Brick pavers are used on some of the public walkways in the TMD. **Ms. Floreen's** bill has support from Montgomery's Commission on People With Disabilities, members of which cite frequent problems with misaligned or missing bricks and slick surfaces.

**Mr. Mansfield** stated he was invited to the T&E Committee to provide information on the brick pavers used in Friendship Heights. Mr. Mansfield shared with the committee that Friendship Heights adhered to the "Bethesda standard," which requires a concrete base and herringbone pattern with only tiny gaps between bricks. Mr. Mansfield stated that the experience with these pavers has been positive. The community has a large number of elderly and disabled residents, and there have been no adverse consequences using this standard. The County Executive may be looking to exempt the downtown areas from the standard, which complicates the picture. This, if it should happen, would be opposed by some members of the Council, since it would render the new legislation moot.

**Mr. Mansfield** stated that members of the T&E Committee, along with members of the Commission on People With Disabilities would be conducting a walking tour of Bethesda, Friendship Heights and other areas for a first hand look at problem areas to confirm if such a ban is necessary. The tour is tentatively scheduled for Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Ken Hartman** added that the standard used in most areas of Bethesda, with the herring bone crosshatch style set in a cement base, provided the most stability and safety. He added that there are some areas of Bethesda which do not adhere to this standard, and this is where problems are seen. The crosshatched pavers installed to the higher standard have been very well received by the Bethesda community.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** thanked **Mr. Mansfield** and **Mr. Hartman** for their information.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** introduced **Councilmember. Marc Elrich**. **Mr. Elrich** was elected to County Council as an At-Large member in 2006. He currently serves on the Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee (PHED), which ensures that development is consistent with and can be supported by existing infrastructure. **Mr. Elrich** is also on the Council Public Safety Committee, with a focus on juvenile issues and concentrates on providing better access to education and other opportunities for all Montgomery County students. **Mr. Elrich** has a Master's degree in Teaching and taught in elementary school for 16 years. Before joining the County Council, he served 10 terms as a member of the Takoma Park City Council. Additionally, he has participated in 14 governmental and civic organizations, including the County Transportation Policy Report Task Force and the Silver Spring Redevelopment Task Force.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** stated that since **Mr. Elrich** would have to leave before the end of the presentation, he is joined by Chief of Staff **Dale Tibbitts**, who will finish the presentation and answer any questions.

**Item 4 -Presentation, Bus Rapid Transit:** **Mr. Elrich** commented on the previous discussion of brick pavers by **Mr. Mansfield**. He stated that he had co-sponsored the bill with Ms. Floreen, because of his experiences with the inferior brick pavers, not the higher standard pavers, so he would be open to examining the arguments in favor of the Bethesda standard.

**Mr. Elrich** stated that he has traveled throughout the County and has met with several advisory committees, various civic organizations, developers and others to advise them that Montgomery County is approaching gridlock. He began looking at traffic issues upon being elected to Council and starting work on the Growth Policy and the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. His office researched various traffic reduction solutions by looking at the efforts of other jurisdictions. Using real tests of infrastructure needs from around the country (vs. the current the County's current model), further growth would probably come to a standstill.

Mr. Elrich attended a Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) regional briefing on air quality after being elected to Council. The briefing revealed that, while the region was doing very well for Nitrogen Oxide emissions (NOx), Carbon Dioxide levels are projected to increase by 48 percent by the year 2030, despite the goal of maintaining 1990 levels. That model assumed that no further changes in air quality would be made.

A second model, based on the California LEV II Emissions Standards (California standards, known as Low Emission Vehicle II), showed that the County could see as much as a 22% increase in emissions over the same time period, which is still too much.

Under LEV II regulations, the Tier I and TLEV classifications were removed for 2004, and the remaining LEV (Low Emission Vehicle), ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicle), and SULEV (Super Low Emission Vehicle – hybrids) categories were made more stringent. These stricter versions are therefore known as "LEV II", "ULEV II", and "SULEV II."

**Mr. Elrich** stated that if the County were to adopt very aggressive CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards, not currently under consideration, there would still be as much as a 16 percent increase in the level of emissions by the target date 2030.

Since none of the models currently being studied show enough significant improvement in CO2 emissions, **Mr. Elrich** researched the number of cars that would need to be taken off the road to show real improvement. He stated it is not necessary to get everyone out of their cars, but there is a certain number necessary in order to avoid gridlock. COG ran the analysis, which stated that an 8.3 percent reduction in Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) in the 2030 would be needed in order to hit the 2002 target for CO2 emissions. There are no precise numbers for 1990 because no one was thinking about CO2 at that time, but the assumption is that a 15 to 20-percent reduction in VMT will achieve 1990 levels.

**Mr. Elrich** stated that a 10 to 15-percent reduction in VMT would ensure that nearly every intersection in the County would have an acceptable Level of Service (LOS). This can be achieved without widening lanes, changes to intersections, or other expensive measures to improve the infrastructure.

**Mr. Elrich** also examined the existing transportation infrastructure, and found that the best option would be Bus Rapid Transit. BRT achieves the reductions in CO2, reduces high levels of congestion and improve the trip for people who are currently driving. Similar BRT systems are in place in Boston, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Ideally, BRT buses would have dedicated lanes. The more realistic option is to make use of the existing roadways, HOV and HOT lanes, and perhaps exclusive lanes during peak travel periods.

**Mr. Elrich's** office looked at all of the origins and destinations in the County to figure out where people live and where they are trying to go. His staff used a GIS system to look at the origin-destination data points to look at routes and develop a map.

Boston was forced in the 1970s to accept a long-term cap on the availability of parking spaces. The business community at the time complained that commerce in Boston would die. However, the opposite happened and the city enjoyed a resurgence of investment. The city made a major investment in transit, adding new lines and improving existing lines. Today, Boston is the only major metropolitan area in clean air attainment.

**Dale Tibbitts** added that the major drawback to reducing traffic the conventional way (adding lanes) is that it works only for a short time. The improvement means that drivers who were willing to forego driving when the roads were congested will now find it easier to drive and will likely start driving again. **Mr. Elrich** added that traffic then is as bad as or worse than it was before the road improvement.

**Mr. Elrich** noted that adding capacity to an intersection allows a developer to build, increasing traffic and making things worse than before. There is an endless cycle of pressure to fix an intersection, and then build because the intersection has been improved. Parking control offers a solution to this cycle. There are two major parking strategies: 1) Pricing strategy that makes the cost prohibitive and moves people to transit; or 2) Limit the parking supply. **Mr. Elrich** stated he advocates a limit on the supply of parking. If the supply is not limited, then enough parking facilities would have to be built to accommodate the maximum supply of cars entering the area. This would require developers to build X number of parking spaces for X amount of square feet of development. Then, in order to achieve air quality or congestion goals, developers are asked to incentivize transit to reduce parking. So, the County builds a garage and then adopts policies to discourage its use. Garage spaces cost from \$50,000 to \$90,000 to build. Why build something you really don't want to use? Why invest and then not be able to recover the revenue to cover the investment because you are pricing people out of parking?

To really impact traffic, parking must be limited. This does not include limits on parking for retail. Limiting employee spaces and the commute is the easiest and most understandable way to achieve reductions. Limiting parking will achieve reductions on the roadways and drive people to transit, resulting in higher transit use. If there are only 45 spaces for every 100 workers, then 55 people are commuting some way other than driving alone.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** noted that there is a contradiction between exploring limits on parking to encourage greater use of transit, all while public transportation facilities are being cut. There have been service cuts to bus routes and there is a possibility that the southern entrance to the Friendship Heights Metro station may be shut down. This would be especially hard, since that is the location of the elevator to serve handicapped riders.

**Mr. Elrich** stated he would show a solution through Bus Rapid Transit, which is a large part of the answer. He is proposing a 100-mile system of BRT in Montgomery County riding primarily in exclusive lanes, and using existing rights-of-way that the County already owns – there would be no need to purchase property or knock down existing structures.

**Greg Knoop** asked if bus timing models were looked at, and which models make for a successful transit system.

**Mr. Elrich** answered that timing is important and that people cannot afford to wait 30 minutes for the next bus if they miss their connection. If a bus is early and is missed, then the wait is even longer.

**Mr. Knoop** asked if models have shown a cost comparison between road improvements and an investment in BRT. Colesville Road has become something of a superhighway through widening over the years - it would

have served as a perfect model for a BRT route. **Mr. Elrich** answered that was not one of the models currently used.

**Mr. Elrich** continued the presentation by stating that there are two basic types of BRT. Most cities that have BRT use lane widening at intersections to accommodate queue jumping for buses. However, this type of feature will probably not be a part of the County plan when finished, because they are not particularly effective in heavy traffic. It provides no advantage to jump ahead of cars if the traffic is backed up at the next intersection.

**Mr. Elrich** is in favor of “heavy BRT,” which provides exclusive bus lanes. This would involve a combination of using median lanes, and the use of curb lanes in the denser areas, like downtown Bethesda or downtown Silver Spring. With signal priority and dedicated lanes, BRT can move with the speed of a train.

One feature currently under discussion is a BRT guidance system. **Mr. Elrich** displayed slides to the committee displaying curb-guided wheels on the buses to help them turn tighter, and provide a smoother ride. The plan is to avoid optical and magnetic guidance systems. Instead of schedules, the plan would be to run these buses in set intervals.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** noted that the slides depict generally less traffic congestion than is in the area. Would building something like a median lane increase congestion? **Mr. Elrich** stated that would not be the case, as the BRT vehicle is remaining inside the median strip. And if cars are being taken off the road, the curb lanes are also available; curb lanes are typically the least efficient lanes, so using them for BRT will not have a significant impact on traffic.

**Mr. Knoop** added that a 50-passenger BRT vehicle moving 1,000 linear feet takes a lot of cars off the road.

In terms of routes, the important thing to know is where the job centers are and will be, and where the workers are coming from. **Mr. Elrich** displayed these areas to the group. The most viable solution is three north-south lines, and connecting cross lines, including the Purple Line route. BRT can be run as a parallel service, supplementing Ride On and Metrobus services, with high frequency headways (6-8 minutes). Passengers are not left wondering when the next bus will come if they miss one. Ride On will be used to pulse people from the neighborhood areas to the main lines. BRT offers real transit centers vs. “sticks in the ground.” The shelters would be better and enclosed against weather.

Vehicles can look more futuristic, a higher grade than current buses, with entry levels at the level of the platform. The retrofit for guide wheels for current buses can be done for about \$20,000. In order, however, to sell BRT effectively to people, the more modern buses, which are similar to train cars, are preferable. In terms of capacity, newer buses in Europe have a capacity of 200. BRT approximates the ‘feel’ of rail travel.

**Mr. Elrich** sees BRT as a long term investment, lasting 50 years or more – not something that can be constructed in three or five years. Long-term bonding may be a way to finance it.

He added that since the buses can use the guide way or travel on regular roads, they can take advantage of the reverse commute on lightly traveled roads on return trips. Single tracking could be used in most cases to move people south along the major roads in the morning; double tracking would be used for some roads (Veirs Mill between Connecticut Avenue and Rockville).

**Mr. Tibbitts** concluded the presentation by displaying BRT proposed routes, examples of current station designs and BRT vehicle designs.

There will need to be a study done to the cost of the project, which will depend, at least in part, on how often the buses run and to fill in other more technical details. The Council staff has defined the concept, but the more technical aspects are still to be answered.

**Item 5 – Ride On Update:** Philip McLaughlin, Ride On Transit Planner, provided an update of Ride On operations and service changes. Ride On discontinued paper transfers in January; riders must now use SmarTrip cards for transfers.

Prior to discontinuing paper transfers, Ride On SmarTrip use was about 16 percent. SmarTrip use is now at about 35 percent, with a trend toward 40 percent for March. Purchase of SmarTrip cards probably has contributed to a slight drop in ridership, since the card must be purchased and then loaded separately with fare value. Transit Services is making efforts to get the SmarTrip card into everyone's hands.

**Mr. Schwarzbart** asked if ridership has possibly seen a reduction due to cutbacks in service.

**Mr. McLaughlin** answered that it is possible. He added that in the spring of last year Ride On cut about 1 ½-percent of its service. In April of this year, service will need to be cut another 1 ½-percent. There was a public forum in January for the FY09 changes. The newest cuts will focus on combination of route reductions for poor performing routes and keeping the route as a whole for others, but cutting midday service. Another difference this year is that, while some of the FY08 cuts were eventually restored, that will not be the case this time.

There will be another public forum on March 24<sup>th</sup> for an additional 5 percent in service cuts for FY10, beginning July 1. This is extremely significant. Poor performing routes will be cut; there will be reductions in evening service, and a restructuring of nine routes. Weekend service will be reduced. Ride On has operated five weekend routes for WMATA since the 1990s. The State pays for 100 percent of the cost for Metrobus service, while Ride On is reimbursed at 50 percent. The County is working with the State to fund these five weekend routes at 100 percent.

Ride On is proposing the elimination of operation of the Sunday T2 Metrobus route, effective July 5<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, the decision regarding full reimbursement for Ride On operation of the route will be made after its elimination.

There will be a reduction in service on the Rt. 34, which operates between Friendship Heights and Bethesda. The evening service headways will be extended from 30 to 45 minutes after 9 pm.

**Item 6 – Commuter Services Updates:** Jim Carlson announced that the TRiPS Commuter Store sign had been installed. The electrical components are in place and it will be lighted shortly. Cabinetry and other interior work are being completed, and the store will be a very attractive addition to Wisconsin Circle.

**Ms. Brecher** added that cabinets, counters and other work have to be completed off-site. Looking through the window, one can get a sense of how it will appear when finished. The base of the customer counter is installed, and the top is being completed. Work is also being done on the separate lighting elements.

The expected completion date is around late spring. The hope is for the end of April. Hours of operation will be 10 am to 7 pm, Monday through Friday. As it currently stands, the store will be fully staffed during those hours.

**Ms. Brecher** announced that the current stimulus bill contains an increase in the tax-free transit subsidy of \$230 per month, up from \$120. The increase was effective in January. There is also a provision for a bicycle subsidy of \$20 per month. The tax-free fringe benefit is tied to an employee's actual commute cost. Commuter Services staff has been getting the word out to employers about the increase. The \$230 benefit has achieved parity with

the parking benefit. The increase is set to expire at the end of calendar year 2010. There will be efforts to continue the benefit after the sunset provision.

CSS will be participating in the Go Green America Expo at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds, the weekend of March 28-29. There will be exhibits dealing with sustainability, conservation and other green issues.

**Ms. Brecher** announced CSS would be putting together an email newsletter, resuming its previous practice of producing a newsletter of transit topics, but in an electronic format.

**Mr. Knoop** stated that mailboxes tend to be overrun with email solicitations and he hoped that it would be in a format that doesn't invite hitting his delete key.

**Ms. Brecher** stated that initially the newsletter would go only to those employers in the database that staff was already dealing with on a regular basis, and who would be willing to receive it. All ideas for getting out important information are welcome. The newsletter would be very brief, perhaps highlighting two or three items. How frequently to send it is also an open question. One of the required elements of the Traffic Mitigation Plans mandated for some employers is to post and distribute information – forwarding the newsletter can fulfill that requirement.

**Mr. Knoop** added that items he downloads to his mobile device must be simple text, no graphics or html links.

**Ms. Brecher** announced that the Annual Commuter Survey will be distributed in about a month.

The committee concurred that **Mr. Schwarzbart's** term as Chair be extended to June, since previous Chair **Bob Cope's** term had been extended to the end of his term on the committee.

Meeting adjourned at

Next meeting date: April 14, 2009

S:\CmtrSvcs\Friendship Hts TMD\Minutes\MinutesFY09\FHTMD Min 03.10.09 rv jc.slb.doc